(d) if so, the projection given by the IRM;

(e) whether the SAIL proposes to set up rural service centres to make availability of steel; and

(f) if so, the details thereof ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF STEEL (SHRI DILIP RAY) : (a) to (f) As a part of the strategy to tap the potential rural market, SAIL has engaged Institute of Rural Management, Anand (IRM) to undertake a study to assess the current trend of demand for steel material in the rural market segment in the states of Gujarat, Maharashtra & Rajasthan. IRM are also required to suggest, *inter-alia,* specific marketing actions and to assess the need to promote the concept of service centres.

Institute of Rural Management, Anand is yet to submit its report on the study.

Agitation by VSP Workers

4520. SHRI RAMACHANDRAIAH RUMANDLA : Will the Minister of STEEL be pleased to state :

(a) whether workers of Visakhapatnam Steel plant were lathi charged recently for agitation;

(b) if so, the causes for the agitation; and

(c) the action taken on the demands of the workers ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF STEEL (SHRI DILIP RAY) : (a) to (c) Some workers of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant were lathi charged recently by the Police, as they had violated prohibitory orders in force under Section 144 CR. PC. The agitation was to demand steps to be taken to avoid privatisation of Visakhapatnam Steel plant. Visakhapatnam Steel plant had submitted a comprehensive turn around proposal for its revival which *inter-alia* included waiver of lossess. The Disinvestment Commission has recommended writing off of the entire accumulated losses of the company as on 31-3-1999 alongwith disinvestment of not less than 51% of its remaining equity to a strategic buyer. The matter is in an advanced stage of inter-ministerial consultations. No final decision has yet been taken.